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ABSTRACT

Work-based learning may occur in the following forms: contracted instruction; cooperative education; school-to-apprenticeship; registered apprenticeship; career exploration; service learning; career internships; career academies; school-based enterprises; and clinical experience programs. The following are key components of work-based learning programs: planned program of job training and experiences; paid work experience; workplace mentoring; instruction in general workplace competencies; and broad instruction in all aspects of industry. Recruiting sufficient numbers of employers willing to commit to the high level of employer involvement implicit in work-based learning and ensuring that worksite learning is of high quality are the most important challenges in developing programs linking school- and work-based learning. Employer involvement in work-based learning may be encouraged through a multifaceted approach that considers employers' capabilities and short-term interests and offers employers several possible paths of involvement and degrees of commitment. After a work-based learning program has been designed, its school and worksite components will require continuous coordination and management. At the secondary level, those tasks are best handled by school-to-work coordinators. At the postsecondary level, work-based learning programs may be based on a mix of work-based learning models and pedagogical approaches and a combination of personalized documentation and standardized performance-based competency profiles. (Contains 17 references.) (MN)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

by Michele Naylor

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Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning includes a number of different activities that can be identified along a continuum from shorter-term introductory types of experiences to longer-term, more intensive ones, including paid work experience and formal training. It is part of a three-pronged approach to school-to-work transition that also includes school-based learning and connecting activities. The new interest in work-based education since passage of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 has resulted in a body of policy formulation, program development, and research activity that can help other policymakers and practitioners at all levels of education develop work-based education policies, models, and practices suited to their own community's needs. This *Digest* reviews types of work-based learning and identify their common and unique elements. Recommendations for structuring work-based learning concludes the *Digest*.

Types of Work-Based Learning Activities

Work-based learning programs come in many forms and sizes. They may be designed exclusively for students at the secondary or postsecondary level or for students at both levels. Work-based learning programs may be schoolwide, districtwide, regional, or statewide, or they may be based on a combination of local and statewide implementation and oversight. Michigan's school-to-work system, for example, is designed and implemented by state and local personnel who work collaboratively to establish partnerships of employers, schools, labor organizations, parents, students, and community members to meet their local community needs by offering one or more occupational learning and career exposure activities (Ingham Intermediate School District [ISD] 1995a).

The following forms of work-based learning are part of the occupational learning component of Michigan's work-based learning system (Ingham ISD 1995a, 1995b):

- **Contracted Instruction**—career and technical education instruction and support services provided to students by a business, industry, or private educational agency through formal written agreements with public education agencies
- **Cooperative Education**—programs combining classroom instruction with employment (part-time jobs during the school year or periods of study and employment alternating on a full-year, semester, or parallel basis)
- **School-to-Apprenticeship**—work-based programs in which employers, employer associations, or employers and unions establish programs allowing high school students to participate in registered apprenticeships while completing their high school graduation requirements
- **Registered Apprenticeship**—conventional apprenticeship programs registered with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training
- **Career Exploration**—programs involving job shadowing and/or worksite mentors);
- **Service Learning**—programs combining meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility
- **Career Internships**—programs in which students spend time in a business, industry, or other organization to gain insight and direct experience
- **Career Academies**—schools typically organized around a single employer or consortium of employers in an industry, and designed to increase awareness of career opportunities within particular occupational areas and teach the basic, life, and employment skills required for jobs or further training
- **School-Based Enterprises**—programs in which groups of students produce goods or services for sale

Another possible form of work-based education is **work-based tech prep**, which Bragg (1995) distinguishes from traditional tech prep programs on the basis of the higher visibility of employers. In work-based tech prep models, employers help develop formal plans linking students' school-based and work-based learning directly to their career goals, they provide formal work-based experiences, and they sponsor mentors and coaches.

At the two-year college level, most (97%) health-related work-based learning programs are based on the **clinical experience** model, whereas nonhealth programs are primarily (64%) based on the **cooperative education** model (Bragg, Hamm, and Trinkle 1995). LaGuardia Community College in New York City offers students a unique activity connecting school and work: co-op seminars at which students enrolled in co-op placements examine issues about work, occupations in general, and competencies required on the job (Grubb and Badway 1995).

Common Elements of Work-Based Learning Activities

Although the nature and scope of the work-based learning activities desired by or possible in individual communities will vary greatly, the following have been identified as essential components of effective work-based learning programs (Ingham ISD 1995a): planned program of job training and experiences, paid work experience, workplace mentoring, instruction in general workplace competencies, and broad instruction in all aspects of industry.

Work-based education may also be defined in contrast to existing forms of education for work. Stern and Rahn (1995), for example, differentiate the new models of work-based learning from traditional cooperative education by virtue of the fact that the new programs also emphasize reflection, relate students' work experience to nonvocational subjects, and in many instances, ensure that students satisfy the course requirements for admission to four-year colleges and universities. Brown (1995) distinguishes the new school-based enterprises from traditional simulations by providing several examples of school-based enterprises in Kentucky in which students develop managerial and entrepreneurship skills (developing marketing and business plans, conducting market surveys, investing for their firms, and determining profit margins). The importance of integration (of academic and vocational education and school- and work-based learning) and high levels of employer involvement is emphasized throughout the literature on work-based learning (for example, Berryman 1995; Bragg 1995; Kazis and Goldberger 1995; Poczik 1995; Raby 1995).

Structuring Work-Based Learning Programs

The most important challenges facing teachers and others involved in programs linking school- and work-based learning experiences are (1) recruiting sufficient numbers of employers willing to commit to the high level of employment involvement implicit in work-based learning and (2) ensuring that learning at the worksite is of high quality (Kazis and Goldberger 1995). Recommendations for overcoming these and other challenges inherent in designing and delivering high quality work-based learning programs include the following:

Overcoming Structural Barriers to Work-Based Learning Programs

Poczik (1995) proposes six strategies for overcoming the structural barriers to work-based learning: a concerted, multiyear effort by

national, state, and local partners to restructure the educational system to integrate work-based education into existing educational programs and connect it to other school-to-work initiatives; a coalition of federal and state labor department officials, employer organizations, and labor unions to address issues involving child labor laws, as well as health, safety, civil rights, and liability related to work-based education; a coordinated effort by employer organizations at the national, state, and local levels to encourage the employer involvement that will be needed for work-based education to become available to all students; regional organization of employer recruitment; and a major public outreach campaign to enlist school personnel, students, parents, employers, and unions in broad implementation of work-based education (pp. 70-72).

Encouraging Employer Involvement

Bailey (1995) argues that an incentive policy encouraging employers to act together may be more effective than general subsidies, tax credits, or other policies that focus on individual incentives. Bremer and Madzar (1995) contend that involving employers in work-based experiences will require a multifaceted approach consistent with employers' capabilities and short-term interests, offering employers several possible paths of involvement and degree of commitment. Toward that end, they make specific policy recommendations regarding tax credits, federal funding through the Job Training Partnership Act, use of labor market projections, general student assessment, involvement of national business organizations, development of school and small business coalitions, and curriculum design.

To practitioners having difficulty recruiting sufficient numbers of employers, Vo (1996) suggests concentrating on businesses with plenty of entry-level positions. Stern (1995) advises offering employers the following less-demanding participation options that still preserve some or all of the benefits of the more ambitious types of involvement: providing job shadowing and unpaid internships; offering placements for teachers; encouraging student attendance and performance; counseling individual students; providing instruction and field trips; giving advice on curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and donating money or materials.

Ensuring High-Quality Learning at the Worksite

The following basic design elements can contribute to the quality of a work-based learning program: consensus on the work-based program's goals and how to achieve them; a written learning plan to guide student learning at the workplace; work-based experiences designed to help students distill and deepen the lessons of work experience; worksite learning activities that have been carefully documented and assessed; orientation program to prepare students (both socially and psychologically) to enter the workplace; and ongoing support and counseling programs to help students cope with the work environment and its demands (Kazis and Goldberger 1995).

Connecting School- and Work-Based Learning

After a work-based learning program has been designed, its school and worksite components will require continuous coordination and management. The various coordination, liaison, technical assistance, placement, and follow-up duties entailed in connecting school- and work-based learning components are best handled by a school-to-work coordinator (Ingham ISD 1995c).

With respect to implementation of work-based learning at the postsecondary level, Bragg and Hamm (1996) found that the following factors contribute to overall program effectiveness: strong program leadership; exclusive connections between the program and its environment; frequent and effective communication with local employers; beliefs about program excellence; an effective school-based-learning component; adequate and diverse financial support; and innovative and pedagogical features (structured individualized plans for student success, an effective mentoring system, articulation agreements from the secondary to the two-year college and to the four-year college levels, program flexibility and adaptability, a mix of work-based learning models and pedagogical approaches, and a combination of personalized documentation and standardized performance-based competency profiles).

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